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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 001707

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EUR/NCE FOR FICHTE

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TAGS: EZ PREL PGOV ETRD PINR KNNP IR

SUBJECT: IRANIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION VISITS PRAGUE BUT
LEAVES EMPTY-HANDED

Classified By: Pol-Econ Chief Michael Dodman for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (C) Summary: The recent visit of an Iranian parliamentary delegation to Prague left a trail of conflicting claims and counterclaims between the Iranians and their Czech hosts. Closer investigation has revealed that most Czech officials remain skeptical about Iran, and the Iranians were unsuccessful at engineering a warming of bilateral relations with the Czechs. End summary.

¶12. (SBU) An Iranian parliamentary delegation visited Prague November 28-December 1, on the invitation of the informal Czech-Iran Friendship Group in the Czech Parliament. Two Czech deputies appear to have been behind the invitation: Vladimir Lastuvka (Social Democrat), Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies Foreign Affairs Committee, and Stanislav Fischer (Communist Party). The visit was a return visit from one that Lastuvka, Fischer and other Czech deputies paid to Iran earlier this year. The Iranian delegation was led by Majlis Presiding Board member Hamid Reza Haji-Babaie.

¶13. (U) The visit generated very little press attention in Prague, but a series of fantastic headlines in the Iranian press, including that Czech FM Cyril Svoboda plans to visit Tehran in early 2006, that the United States had forced the unwilling Czechs to host the RFE broadcasting facility, and that the Czech Republic supported Iran's right to develop nuclear technology and would begin active cooperation. All are incorrect.

¶14. (C) News that Czech Prime Minister Paroubek had met with the group prompted the Ambassador to write to Paroubek on December 5 indicating USG concern that the Czech government not abandon their traditional tough position towards the Iranian regime. DCM delivered the letter directly to Paroubek's Foreign Policy Advisor with a request for better and closer cooperation on such sensitive issues.

¶15. (C) In an effort to determine what actually took place during the Iranians visit, Emboffs met separately with Chairman Lastuvka; Miloslav Stasek, MFA Director for the Middle East and Africa; and representatives from EU embassies. The MFA assured us that there was no truth to any of the Iranian claims: there is no change in the GOCR's traditional policy of steps to limit Iranian nuclear capabilities; there will be Foreign Minister visit to Tehran; the Czechs continue to fully support the broadcasts of RFE/RL's Radio Farda (apparently during a call several months ago by the Iranian Charge d'Affaires on then-new Deputy FM Basta the subject of Radio Farda was raised and rather than simply cite the importance of freedom of the press, Basta infuriated the Charge by giving a vigorous defense of the

importance of RFE to Czechoslovak dissidents, noting that the Radios' mission remains important). Other specifics:

-- The "meeting" with PM Paroubek was a drop-by at a meeting already taking place in the parliament, later described as an "extended handshake." The MFA believes the drop-by took place as a favor to Lastuvka, who represents the left wing of Paroubek's CSSD party. The MFA's Middle East Department believes that unlike some other foreign policy issues such as the Balkans and China, there is no/no rift between PM Paroubek and his Foreign Ministry. Both remain skeptical of the Iranians and do not see utility in closer ties at this stage.

-- In the end, there was no meeting between the delegation and Deputy FM Basta. Basta was apparently called away at the last moment, and when the delegation arrived at the MFA, Political Director Martin Povejsil was there to receive them.

The delegation stayed only a few minutes. MFA staff had been resistant to any meeting with the delegation, but told us that the meeting with Basta (a CSSD appointee) had been scheduled for political reasons. Ambassador had raised our concerns about the call directly with FM Sloboda, who indicated he was working to prevent a meeting. (The Iranian delegation had canceled a visit scheduled for the previous week precisely because they had not been granted any senior government appointments.)

-- Aside from meetings with parliamentarians, the only other official event in Prague was a brief meeting with Minister of Industry and Trade Milan Urban (CSSD), also at the parliament. With the Iranian government enforcing a selective trade embargo on the Czechs to protest the Radio Farda broadcasts, Urban made a pitch for improved trade relations.

-- MFA Deputy Minister for Bilateral Relation Tomas Pojar, reacting to the presence of the Iranian delegation in town, announced to the press: "the visit will not change anything in our approach to Iran. We continue to condemn the statements of President Mahmud Ahmadinezhad about destroying Israel. We will not do anything that would be in contravention of the existing EU approach toward Tehran."

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